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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9539
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 0340
RUEHCD/AMCONSUL CIUDAD JUAREZ 0339
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS 6878
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFSS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

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DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/18/2017

TAGS: PGOV PHUM KDEM NI

SUBJECT: LAWYERS PROTEST MAY 18

Classified By: Political Counselor Russell J. Hanks for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

¶11. (C) Summary: The Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) urged its members to boycott the courts on May 18 as a nation-wide protest of conduct of the April 2007 elections. A legal contact told Poloff May 17 that lawyers were also planning a May 18 demonstration at the Abuja High Court, which he hoped would build momentum toward a general labor strike. However, the planned demonstration may have fizzled in the face of renewed promises by Inspector General of Police Sunday Ehindero that all forms of rallies and meetings to protest the April general elections are banned and will be forcefully dispersed. Polspec confirmed that the Abuja High Court was deserted May 18, signalling that the boycott worked though the protest did not materialize. End Summary.

¶12. (U) NBA President Olisa Agbakoba announced on May 17 that the organization's National Executive Committee decided to hold a "national protest action in all 88 branches across 36 states and the FCT to protest the conduct of the 2007 general elections in Nigeria." According to Agbakoba, "the decision was taken to highlight the reports of domestic and international observers including in particular NBA election monitors that the 2007 elections were massively rigged and did not reflect the intent of Nigerians." He characterized the elections as a "grave blow to the rule of law and democracy in Nigeria." The NBA urged aggrieved parties to continue to seek redress through the election tribunals and noted that the association will continue to push for the reform of Nigeria's electoral system through amendments of the Constitution and Electoral Act.

¶13. (C) Poloff met with Chidi Odinkalu (protect) of the Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI) on May 17. He is the Africa Senior Legal Officer for OSJI and Coordinator for the Section on Public Interest and Development Law of the NBA. Odinkalu has been actively involved in formulating Nigerian civil society's response to the elections. The OSJI has suffered some harassment by the State Security Service (SSS) and Odinkalu has been personally threatened by the Inspector General of Police (IGP). Odinkalu told Poloff that he hopes the May 18 lawyers strike will cause a flashpoint of protest that will facilitate further attempts by civil society to dispute and possibly overturn Yar'Adua's election. He anticipated that the police would turn out in full force on May 18 and would possibly do physical violence to demonstrating attorneys. The point of the NBA action, he

said, was to help build momentum toward a general 2-day labor strike soon. (Note: The Nigerian Labor Congress and Trade Union Congress announced May 18 that they will hold a 2-day strike on May 28-29 to protest the inauguration.)

¶4. (C) Political specialist went to the Abuja High Court on May 18 and confirmed that the NBA boycott was in force. However, the planned demonstration appeared to have fizzled. IGP Sunday Ehindero reminded the media on May 17 that rallies and meetings aimed at protesting the alleged mass rigging of the April general elections have been banned and that the police will use force to disperse protestors. He told the police that they must be "very firm" in dealing with rallies and demonstrations and said that "we have given you sufficient tear gas canisters." He also urged police to be vigilant in their states and "use your covert security to anticipate and pre-empt certain actions."

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